

WRIGHT BROTHERS MASTER PILOT AWARD

**Fairbanks Flight Standards District
Office Honoree 2006**



THOMPSON, Warren Richard.

Warren Richard Thompson was born December 30, 1929, in Cavalier, North Dakota, to Howard and Muriel Thompson. Warren's interest in aviation began at a young age, but since money was scarce at the time, getting the funding for flying lessons was not easy.

Luckily, when Warren was 14 years old, an instructor in Kalispell, Montana, started a flight school in Libby, Montana, to provide training under the GI Bill. The instructor would fly aircraft to Libby, and Warren and his friends were given the job of guarding the aircraft at night in exchange for flying lessons. Later, when Warren was in high school, he worked at the airport as a general helper. In exchange, he got credit through his high school, and more free lessons. In 1946, at the age of 17, Warren soloed his first aircraft. After that, he was able to borrow the plane for free, whenever it wasn't being used. In 1947, Warren got his private pilot certificate in Libby, Montana.

After high school, Warren left Libby, and spent the next four years serving his country in the Navy. He was assigned to a photo squadron out of San Diego, California, and acted as radio radar operator on B-24's and twin Beeches. The squadron specialized in high altitude photography, which was used mainly for mapping purposes. Warren got his first glimpse of Alaska when his squadron was tasked with flying to Umiat to take aerial pictures; thereby, aiding in the State's initial exploration for oil.

Warren vividly remembers his first stay in Kotzebue. He was a crewmember on a navy mission to Kobuk when his plane was diverted to Kotzebue, due to poor weather conditions. Unfortunately, the runway at Kotzebue wasn't as good as it is these days, and when the plane touched down on the soft runway, the nose gear buried itself, just before breaking off completely. Warren, and his fellow crewmembers, spent the next 3 or 4 days in Kotzebue, waiting for replacement parts. Little did Warren know that he would later return to Kotzebue, where he would spend more than 50 years of his life! He was also unaware that his future bride witnessed the event and thought that he was one "fine looking man with his nice curly hair!"

In 1952, after leaving the Navy, Warren hired on with the Federal Aviation Administration as a Flight Service Station Specialist. After spending five or six months in Oklahoma City being trained, Warren was stationed at the Flight Service Station in Umiat. Later that year, the Umiat Station was closed, and Warren was given the choice of moving to Galena or Kotzebue. Warren chose Kotzebue, where he spent the next

25 years working for the FAA at the Flight Service Station.

In 1953, Warren met May at a party in Kotzebue. May was born in Deering, and had moved to Kotzebue in 1950 to work as a nurse's aid at the hospital. The couple was married in 1954, in a ceremony that took place at the FAA housing in Kotzebue.

Warren remembers a much different Kotzebue back then. It was about one-fourth as big as it is now, and had only one road: present-day Front Street. The couple lived in FAA housing at the Flight Service Station. AC-123 aircraft brought them groceries one time per month.

When the couple needed to go to the small store in Kotzebue, Warren would either fly them in their airplane and land on a runway near the present-day water tank, or they would walk. May says she preferred flying though, as it was much quicker than walking!

While working at the Flight Service Station in Kotzebue, Warren continued his flying career. In 1955, he purchased a PA-18 and brought it up from Vancouver as his personal aircraft. In 1956, he completed his commercial pilot training in Kotzebue. Over the next few years, Warren added seaplane and instrument ratings, and earned an Airline Transport Pilot certificate, with a multiengine rating. During those years, besides working full-time shift work for the FAA, Warren also flew about 600 hours per year flying his personal aircraft, as well as working for all of the air taxi operators in Kotzebue. Warren says that he had a waiver from the FAA to work for all of the air taxis in town,

because they couldn't find qualified pilots to work for them.

In 1965, Warren started the Civil Air Patrol in Kotzebue. He has been on countless rescue missions, often in treacherous conditions. One of his most memorable rescues occurred in the 1970's when he was called upon to rescue the occupants of two or three planes that had wrecked on the ice while hunting polar bears, about two hours out of Point Hope. A C-130 aircraft had located the group, but was unable to bring them in. Warren made several trips out onto the pack ice, effecting the rescue by flying the grateful pilots back to town.

In 1985, after retiring from the FAA, Warren went to work for Ryan Air Service, known now as ATS. He is a company check airman as well as an instructor in the Cessna 207. Company rumor has it that 10 or 15 years ago, Warren was taken to task by the FAA for not having current charts available during an inspection. Warren's reaction was, "Why did he need current charts? He had flown for years and years in the area before the FAA had even charted it!"

Over the years, Warren has logged more than 38,600 hours in single engine and light twin aircraft, mainly in and around Kotzebue. He has been the proud owner of two aircraft, the first of which he wore out and the second, a PA-18-160, which just turned over 10,000 hours. (It had less than 500 hours when he got it.) He's flown a variety of aircraft including the Piper J-3 Cub, PA-18, PA-31, Cessna 185, 206, 207, 402, twin Beech, DeHavilland Beaver, and Otter.

Warren is a big game hunter, having spent many years as an assistant guide. His hunting accomplishments include three or four polar bears, lots of caribou, moose, grizzly bears, and wolves, as well as hunting sheep every year for about 15 years.

Last year, May tried her hand at hunting and bagged her first caribou. According to Native tradition, it is customary for the hunter to donate the meat from her first hunt to the elders of the community. May said that the only problem she had was finding anyone in the community older than she was to donate the meat to!

Besides hunting, Warren also enjoys fishing, picnics, berry picking, and spending time at his cabin with his family. He says he doesn't have to worry about taking proficiency checks in his airplane; May manages to keep him in line and rates all of his landings from, "good, to better, to not so good!" Warren and May live in Kotzebue and have six surviving children and 11 grandchildren.